
Imagine Life in Another Country on Another Continent: Teaching in the Age of Globalization

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As I wake up in my new country of Botswana, it is humid, but peaceful. (Andy, the University of Georgia)

I have been a citizen of Botswana, which is located in the Southern part of Africa for two decades, and I have never been so free in life until this morning when I woke up and found myself as a citizen of America. (Nomsa, the University of Botswana)

I woke up this morning to the crowing of birds and the moaning of cows. (Alissa, the University of Georgia)

To imagine myself waking up as being a citizen of the United States of America brings fear and joy to my person! (Gomolemo, the University of Botswana)

When I think of Africa, I picture an under-developed country. (Dana, the University of Georgia)

Waking up one morning and finding that I am now a citizen of the United States of America is an incident that would drive me crazy. (Dimpho, the University of Botswana)

The above lines come from essays written in response to the following prompt: Imagine waking up one

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morning and finding that you are now a citizen of the United States of America or a citizen of Botswana, Africa. How do you feel about this? How do you imagine your new life? What will be different or the same?

Students in teacher education degree programs at our two universities wrote imaginatively about life on another continent in another country. This imaginative essay-writing exercise was an adaptation of Sadker and Sadker's (1994) gender awareness exercise that asks young people to imagine waking up one morning and finding they are now a member of the other sex. We used the gender awareness exercise successfully with youth from Botswana (Commeyras and Montsi 2000), and we thought it would be interesting to use it for a different purpose—to foster cross-cultural interest, sensitivity, and awareness. We also wanted to learn more about the potential for collaboration between the two of us as we worked as teacher educators on different continents. We see value in modeling for teacher candidates the potential for collaboration between teachers in different classrooms, schools, towns, countries, and continents. In that way, we can transcend traditional notions of classroom-bounded learning.

Who We Are

We are teacher educators with a friendship across continents and cultures. It was an October day in 1997 when we met at Tonota Teacher's College in Northern Botswana. Commeyras was on the African continent for the first time as a visiting lecturer on gender issues in education at the University of Botswana. Mazile was a newly hired lecturer of curriculum development at Tonota Teacher's College, one of several teachers colleges in Botswana. We met with other lecturers that day to consider ways to promote sensitivity and awareness of gender issues. Little did we know that that was the beginning of a friendship and a collaborative relationship that would bring us together for a series of projects. A few months later, Mazile joined the faculty at University of Botswana, where we shared an office. Our mutual interest in gender issues led us to work closely in a variety of ways; Commeyras even attended the wedding of Mazile's only brother at the family homestead in Serowe, a large village in central Botswana.

When Commeyras returned to Botswana in July 1999, we decided to collaborate during the coming academic year in a way that would allow us to

explore cross-continent cultural teaching with our respective students who are preparing to be teachers. We value learning from each other and the experiential knowledge we have of each other's country. Mazile studied and worked for ten years in the United States, and Commeyras, who lived and worked for one year in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, has made two return trips and expects to make more. We believe that teachers and those preparing to be teachers need to know more about the world beyond their national and continental borders.

Understanding Globalization

Globalization is rapidly narrowing the distance between developing and developed nations. Technological changes in communication and increasing economic opportunities have greatly intensified the need for us to know about each other. It is evident, however, that even though it has become easier to communicate with one another, we still lag behind in terms of really knowing about people from other countries. For the most part, the relationship between developed and developing nations has been one of unequal power. Inequalities have surfaced in economic, political, racial, and technological relations. Developing nations are often viewed as "poor" and only valuable to the global community as a reservoir for raw materials and as strategic locations for the developed nations to fulfill what they perceive as their God-given responsibility of guarding and protecting the rest of the world. Developed nations such as the United States are mistakenly viewed as nations in which milk and honey flows for everybody and where freedom, democracy, equality, and social justice reign.

"We are now in the new international system of globalization," wrote Friedman (2000) in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, in which he offered an understanding of globalization that he developed from worldwide experiences as a foreign affairs columnist for the *New York Times*. Globalization is different from anything we have experienced

before because of its one overarching feature—integration. "The world has become an increasingly interwoven place, and today, whether you are a company or a country, your threats and opportunities increasingly derive from who you are connected to" (8). Globalization began replacing the cold war system when the Berlin Wall fell. During the cold war period, division and walls defined the world; now we are moving increasingly toward integration and webs. According to Friedman, the most salient question in globalization is: "To what extent are you connected to everyone?" (10).

Given the integration and connectivity of globalization, we think it appropriate to describe our exploration of ways of teaching across continents, countries, and cultures as an educational manifestation of globalization. The frontier looms vast when we stop to contemplate the educational possibilities that accompany the development of globalization as an international system. Keeping a historical perspective in mind, we acknowledge that a focus on the world or international matters is not new to teaching. We remember, for example, reading *Social Models of Teaching* (Weil and Joyce 1978), in which the authors wrote that one of the three responsibilities of teaching is "social development and preparation for national and world citizenship" (1). Globalization is changing the ways in which we can meet that responsibility and the ways we think about world citizenship.

Friedman (2000, 24) noted that in academe "there is a deeply ingrained tendency to think in terms of highly segmented, narrow areas of expertise, which ignores the fact that the real world is not divided into such neat little beats and that the boundaries between domestic, international, political, and technological affairs are all collapsing." With globalization, that has to change. Friedman told of two Yale international relations historians who are broadening their curriculum to produce strategists who think like globalists rather than particularists. It seems to us that something similar needs to happen in preparing teachers and in thinking about that

curriculum. Teachers, too, need to think like globalists if they are to prepare their students for world citizenship. In part, that means integrating across such traditional subject divisions as literacy, geography, politics, economics, current events, and all manner of social studies.

Our acknowledgment that globalization is a reality does not mean we are entirely enamored of it. As Friedman and others have noted, there are threats to cultural diversity from globalization. It tends to "involve the spread (for better and for worse) of Americanization—from big Macs to iMacs to Mickey Mouse" (2000, 9). As educators, we certainly have had that threat in mind, and that is why we choose to engage our students in ways that allow them to acknowledge their cultures and to think about their own lives in terms of the lives of those from another continent and country in which there exist multiple cultures.

Friedman responded to the challenge of understanding and explaining the incredibly complex system of globalization by doing two things at once. He looked at the world through a "multilens perspective" and told simple stories. He did not rely on weaving grand theories but saw himself as an information arbitrator. We see parallels in our project. Our students are sharing stories of imagination that offer multilens perspectives on their own lives and those of others. Our role as teachers is to arbitrate matters between the two student constituencies.

What we describe here is by no means intended to be prescriptive for other teachers collaborating across real or imagined borders. Rather, our intention is to provide examples that we hope will inspire and encourage other teachers. We enjoy imagining what others may do after reading the result of our project.

Photographic Possibilities

We have explored several ways of using photography in our collaboration. After writing the essays about waking up as citizens of another country on another continent, both groups of students watched a slide show about their new location. Commeyras had taken

photographs in Botswana during the year she lived and worked there. She had also taken photographs on the campus of the University of Georgia and around Athens, Georgia, where the university is located. Those she sent to Mazile to share with her students. After viewing the slides, we asked our students to think about what they had written in their essays, in light of what they had seen in the photographs. Mazile's students wrote their reactions, and Commeyras's students discussed their reactions during class. The slide presentation precipitated a variety of responses from both groups.

Students in Botswana

The students at the University of Botswana stated that to a large extent, the photographic images confirmed what they had initially written in their essays. Certain photos inspired more responses than others. One was of two young lovers lying on a vast green lawn on the University of Georgia campus. Commeyras took that photograph precisely because she knew that that kind of public display of romance was different from what is considered appropriate in Botswana. The following two excerpts show that students reacted differently.

The slides portrayed an anti-social kind of behaviour displayed by university students. Students of different sexes were kissing in an open space within the premises of the university. This is something that is unheard of in Botswana and if students dare do that they would do it in the dark. This shows differences between our culture and the American culture—we are socialised differently. (Andrew)

The other scene that gave me waves was seeing the university couples lying on the lawn criss-crossed without inhibitions. It is a rare scene here, and whenever it occurs it is labeled public indecency. Maybe I had this vaguely in mind because in my first assignment I mentioned that my society is too conservative and has a lot of expectations, thereby stating that I look forward to living freely and independently without having to adhere to societal expectations and apologising for the things I would not apologise for had it not been for my demanding society. (Helmi)

Commeyras also took pictures of cows and horses grazing because she knew of the importance of cattle in Botswana. Indeed, the students were interested to see livestock in the United States.

Seeing cattle lying in the fields, some grazing, I became so shocked. . . . I thought they only valued things like fancy cars, big houses but not cattle. (Nomsa)

In my first essay, I did not mention anything about livestock; this is because I never thought of seeing any in America. The photographic slides in this regard showed me that the Americans, just like us, keep livestock. (Thamuku)

Viewing the photographs also led students to comment on what they did not see. Because there were only twenty-two slides taken in one town, they provided a limited representation of U.S. life. What the students found missing is informative and indicates an opportunity for future response from U.S. students. For example, several students wondered about why they did not see many black Americans, and they also wondered about poverty.

When going out to look at the slides, I hoped to see black people and also to see some pictures showing city slums. All these I did not see. All but one of the slides showed only white people; this on its own disappointed me. This trend however shows the discrimination I referred to in my first essay. It shows that the blacks and whites in America are separated, and that there are some areas in which there is a preponderance of white people, and in others black. The same thing applies to school; in the pictures that were showing a university, I only saw whites. (Thamuku)

Among the slides, there was a photograph of a trailer park that by American standards would be considered impoverished. We were interested to find in the response different readings of the slides with regard to poverty. One student astutely observed the following:

When I wrote the essay, I had totally disregarded the fact that poverty levels in developed countries are not necessarily identical to those in the Third World countries, owing to standards of living. You find that slum dwellers would be comparatively well off by our standards . . . such that when I tried to spot any slum dwellings within the slideshow, the only

thing that ever came close to my idea of a ghetto was a trailer park and mobile homes. (Moremi)

Students in the United States

When the photographic slides of Botswana were shown to the students at the University of Georgia, they had the opportunity to ask questions of someone from Botswana. Commeyras had arranged for a lecturer from the University of Botswana (Tonic Maruatona, who was at the time pursuing a doctoral degree in adult education) to be present to help explain the slide content. All the slides were taken in one of two sites—Gaborone, the capital city, and Mochudi, a village to the north that is the capital of the Bakgatla people. Commeyras's purpose in taking the photographs was to capture industrial Botswana alongside traditional ways of living that are more often associated with Africa by the rest of the world. For example, there was a photograph taken at the train station in which one of the people walking is a woman carrying a large plastic cooler on her head.

A photograph of Orapa House, owned by De Beers, led to questions about the mining and marketing of diamonds. The students were surprised to learn that within the country few people own diamond jewelry and that most do not view diamonds as valuable in the same way as do many people in other cultures. The word *diamonds* did appear in several of the students' essays.

My husband owns a diamond mine here in Botswana. (Somer)

My husband and other men from the village head to the river to sift for diamonds to sell in the nearby city. (Beth)

Having imagined diamonds in their essays, the U.S. students were primed to learn from our Botswana guest about some of the politics and issues related to the De Beers Diamond Company and the government of Botswana.

Students also saw photographs of rondavel homes, both those made of concrete and those made of traditional mud and thatch. The prevalence of

urban photographs led one student to ask at the end of the presentation whether what she had seen was representative. Her question elicited the following exchange.

Maruatona: In Botswana there are cities such as the capital Gaborone and up north there is Francistown. There are also very big villages like Mochudi, which, you could see from the photograph, is very spread out. And then there are small villages in the rural areas. Also important are the lands for farming and keeping cattle which are often far . . . even from rural villages. A significant portion of the population still lives in rural villages where it is less expensive.

Commeyras: Are villages or homesteads without electricity?

Maruatona: Yes.

Commeyras: Are there villages where you have to walk to get water?

Maruatona: Every village's water has been reticulated so that you get clean water. You don't need bottled water. You open the tap and clean water will run through it. You just take your water and do your cooking or whatever. That is different from some other countries where people are still fetching water from the same place where animals come for water. But at the cattle posts that are far from the villages you have to get standing water and boil it before drinking it.

Water had been a concern in several of the students' essays so it was good for them to get some realistic information about the situation in Botswana. One student asked, "Now I wonder if the water is clean." Our Botswanan visitor replied, "Water from the mountains is our primary source of drinking water. I wash my face in the river."

Students on both sides of the Atlantic found the slide presentation of great interest. We found that it did invite more reflection on their initial ideas about life elsewhere. We speculate that their interest and attention to details in the photographs were heightened because they had first written essays in which they imagined themselves in that country.

Student Photographic Responses

After showing the slides of Botswana, Commeyras showed her students copies of the slides she had sent to Botswana. When Commeyras wondered out loud

what kinds of photographs her students would have chosen to send, student Katie Simon said she would like to take photographs in response to the essays. She and another student, Sarah Bridges, have taken off with that idea and have presented their photo responses juxtaposed with poems and essays that Mazile and Commeyras wrote at two conferences on educational research.

Students in both countries showed great interest in the slide presentations. Their attention to details in the photographs resulted from their having imagined themselves citizens of the other country.

Noteworthy is the extent to which Simon included pictures in which both black and white people are together. Commeyras asked Simon to link the photos with something she had read in the essays by the Botswanan students and to explain her photographic response in writing. She chose the following excerpts:

Racism remains an unbearable element in the American continent. The fear of white racism, which makes white people to avoid, ignore, and degrade the identity of blacks would make me uneasy. It would be very difficult for me to live amongst people who portray me as primitive, backwards and of a negative race. Therefore, I will live in perpetual frustration of being dehumanized. (Bengani)

Another sad thing about the United States of America is the racial tension which is an eye sore to the life here. The whites are blaming the blacks for high crime rates and other bad things. The blacks on the other hand blame the whites and sometimes show a measure of hate towards them. The conflict is historically oriented. It goes back to the time of the slave trade. (Kolobe)

Simon wrote the following to accompany her photographic response:

The very first essays I read mentioned poor race relations in America. These gave me mixed reactions. Even though I see exactly why these students in Botswana would write the things they did, from seeing the news of racial crimes and

poverty affecting African Americans, I want to believe that things are changing—or, more specifically, that I am changing things. My classmate Sarah and I are both involved in the Big Sister, Big Brother program and feel that it is a step in the direction for understanding and change. I wanted to take a picture of college students (who are mostly white) and their little brothers and sisters (who are mostly African Americans). The pictures are from an annual picnic that the program

throws with food, sports and music. I was especially moved by the young African American boy and the white male college student and their affectionate interactions. This is something that you do not see every day here; but my point is—it is happening. To me, it is demonstrating that things are changing, starting with the youngest generations which will hopefully slowly start to change race relations in America in the present and the future.

With another photograph, Simon indicated how her perception of the once-ordinary had been altered. She took a picture of a truck belonging to a water purification company, parked in front of a large, two-story frame house with a full porch. Probably that scene would not have caught her attention before our talk about the availability of potable water in Botswana as compared to other places in Africa. Because of the issue of availability of clean water in Botswana, she found the presence of a water purification truck noteworthy, because it shows that even in the United States, there are concerns about safe drinking water. From a teaching perspective, the photograph was evidence that a student's sensibilities have been influenced by the Other Continent/Other Country project.

We then wondered what more we might discover about what our students were learning through their photographic responses as opposed to the standard use of discussion or written work.

Although the use of photography in education is additional expense, it seems worthwhile to explore ways for students to engage in photographic expression as another learning tool. Single-use cameras might eventually become something that schools purchase along with paper and pencils.

Students' Reading Responses

An unexpected dimension of our exploration was the reading that students chose to do as part of the experience of imagining life on another continent. Mazile's students wrote their essays as a take-home assignment, and some of them read materials to give them ideas for their essays. She did not ask or even suggest that they do that. On several of the essays, students indicated their reading by including a reference list with their essays. Bengani listed *Industrial Society and Social Welfare* (Wilensky and Lebeaux 1958) and *The Pursuit of Loneliness* (Slater 1970). She also included a personal interview with Dr. Haavick, a U.S. citizen who is a lecturer at the University of Botswana. Mazile plans to engage the Botswanan students in a discussion of how they chose their textual resources to alert them to the resources that exist and to the factors that need to be considered in choosing the most reliable sources with up-to-date information. Judging the credibility of sources addresses the critical thinking objective of our project.

Commeyras's students did not read anything prior to writing their essays because they were not given that opportunity, but later several voluntarily chose to read about Africa for another assignment that focused on their developing their reading lives (Commeyras, in press). The following is something one student wrote that indicates her thinking in new ways with regard to the concept of beauty.

One of my favorite articles was on various African marriage rituals. I am not a die-hard feminist by any means. But, I do believe in equality, and importantly choosing my own husband. Some things that really struck me were how young they apparently get married in Berber. I

know that I thought I was so old when I was sixteen, but I surely was not old enough to get married. Also, in Karo, I could not believe what women had to go through when they reach puberty. They are purposefully scarred on their stomachs in razor like incisions with ashes rubbed in them to make them heal in raised patterns. I would never go through that kind of pain just to be more attractive to a man. At first I thought that this sounded crazy. However, when you think about it, why do women take so long to get ready? Because we are putting on make-up, fixing our hair just right, shaving, etc. Why do we get plastic surgery and breast enlargements? These things do not seem extreme to us because it is our culture. But, just like the women of Karo, we try to change our outward appearance to please males. So, after analyzing my feelings, I decided that it is not my place to judge other cultures in saying what is right and what is wrong. The reason why I feel this way is because in my own way, I am like these women. (Karen)

Another student went to the World Wide Web to read news about Africa. Commeyras had passed along to her students the addresses of several Web sites she knew of with the suggestion that they might fulfill one of the other course assignments, to engage in Internet reading, by checking on news from Africa.

We believe that when students choose to read and select their own sources, those materials often have a greater impact on their learning than when they read assigned texts. As teacher educators, we have as one of our objectives to cultivate in those becoming teachers the inclination and habit of reading to learn, and of seeking sources to inform themselves. What remains our challenge is to create educational conditions that motivate university students to find their own text sources and to do so in a way that is guided by principles of critical reading and consideration of the reliability and credibility of sources.

Students' Written Responses

One student from Botswana wrote Mazile a letter about his reactions to reading the essays. An excerpt from Moremi's letter follows:

I have had the honour of going through the "Imagine . . ." essays. . . . Most of the authors acknowledge their ignorance con-

cerning knowledge of Africa. . . . [T]he disturbing factor is that the accounts are extremely simplistic and overly stereotypical. . . . I am at a loss as to why, in this age of advanced technology and information explosion, the authors still retain this old image of Africa. . . . The so-called globalization phenomenon seems to exist only nominally. This means that there is still a lot to be done. . . . I have never been to America. I don't need to have been there to have a working understanding of what it's like there. . . . I would like to extend my warmest appreciation for this enlightening experience. . . . And I would have liked to maintain correspondence with some of the authors, but on account of resource limitation (namely Internet access) I just cannot.

Moremi reminds us of the ironic fact that despite the plethora of information resources available, U.S. students at age twenty have a limited view of life on the African continent. Surely this is an indication of the lack of serious attention given to learning about Africa in the U.S. educational system. That is curious because a significant proportion of the U.S. population are American citizens whose ancestors were brought in slavery to this country from Africa. U.S. educators should endeavor to educate our students to know about the world and know where to find information about peoples living outside the continental United States.

One student in Commeyras's class wrote an open letter to all the students in Botswana after having read several of their essays and having participated in a class discussion where she heard what her classmates found in the essays they had read. Commeyras sent that letter to Mazile, who shared the letter and the essays by the University of Georgia student with her students before they went to their practicing teacher assignments, which completed their postgraduate studies. Parts of the student's letter follows:

I want to say that I am embarrassed by the paper that I wrote about waking up finding myself a citizen of Botswana. I can honestly tell you that before we discussed your country and saw slides, I only knew that Botswana was somewhere in Africa. I found your papers very interesting and informative. . . . I guess I am writing to you now because I was profoundly moved

by some of your thoughts. I am sure that you know that many of the things my classmates and I wrote about your country were very stereotypical. I am also sure that you know that many of the things you discussed in your writings were also stereotypical of American life. For instance, all Americans do not carry guns. Neither I, nor anyone I know carries a gun. I know that we have much violence in this country; it is something that we worry about also. But remember, whatever makes the headlines is news. It is news because it is something that does not happen on a regular basis. . . . Being an American is also not about orgies and drugs. I know that people do these types of things; these things happen everywhere. I do not know if things of this nature are more typical in the U.S. I can only assure you that it is not something that most of us experience. I guess what I am trying to say is that most people are just like you and your families. They work hard, they love their children, they take care of their aging parents, they have hopes and dreams that do not always come to fruition, they have disappointments and heartache, mourn the loss of loved ones, etc. People are people everywhere on this planet. . . . I am not trying to convince you that the U.S. is better than any other country in our world. . . . I would very much like to correspond with anyone that is interested.

Ghanian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu (1996) has written a book that confronts the issues of universalism and particularism in human culture, issues reflected in the student's mention in her letter of what she believes to be universals—working, dreaming, hoping, loving, caring. Wiredu argues that it logically follows that there are cultural universals: "Suppose there were no cultural universals. The intercultural communication would be impossible. But there is intercultural communication. Therefore, there are cultural universals" (21). The concept of intercultural communication is indeed what our exploration has been about. And the issues of how lives situated in different cultural contexts are similar and different is precisely what we wanted to interest our students in, enough so that they would keep investigating and would consider investigating with their own students.

Several of Mazile's students came to her after the completion of the course and voiced their appreciation for the let-

ter from University of Georgia student Cynthia Dodgen. Bengani, who shared with us her reactions to the essays written by the students in Georgia, was concerned about their narrow views of life in Africa. Her impression was that her U.S. counterparts saw Africa as static and that the university students "think Africa is poverty-stricken and that most of the things in America are not avail-

ground knowledge and didn't have the opportunity to access information. I don't want them to think that we wouldn't have done that had we the opportunity."

What Bengani read as belittling was in the view of one American student an idealized life that would be less harried and hurried than the one she was presently living. It is not uncommon for

The Botswanan student was concerned about the Americans' views of life in African countries. She feared that her U.S. counterparts saw Africa as static and poverty stricken. She said the project was an excellent method to encourage understanding in both countries.

able here." Their view of life in Africa seemed to her belittling. Bengani thought the essays conveyed the idea that things from America or Europe are superior. She explained, "Civilization in Europe may not be civilization in Botswana. Being unwelcoming to other people's way of life is one thing that can be termed uncivilized." When asked if she thought the essay-writing project and exchange had been educationally worthwhile, Bengani answered, "Yes." She thought it had been an excellent way of sharing perceptions and having them challenged. She saw potential for greater understanding and appreciation on both sides. It seemed that the letter written by Dodgen was important to her finding the experience educational.

Fortunately, there was awareness among the U.S. students that what they were able to imagine was limited and showed how little they know about Africa in the year 2000. When the American students read the essays from Botswana and saw that those students had been able to do some reading to inform their writing, they were concerned about sending their off-the-cuff essays. One said, "Is there some way we can include a disclaimer saying that we were in a different position when we wrote our essays? They weren't meant to be offensive. We didn't have back-

those in highly industrialized places to romanticize the life of those who lived in an agrarian, self-sufficient way. From our teacher perspective, what is important is that our students are thinking about who they are, how they perceive others, and how others perceive them. Such an exercise encourages self-reflection and a desire to use the vast resources available to learn more about life elsewhere.

Concluding Considerations

Our collaborative effort across continents and countries challenges the traditional ways of teaching, knowing, and learning. It has the potential of raising social consciousness and developing global educators. Educational systems in many countries reflect and perpetuate the cultural status quo and the ways of the dominant groups; yet it is in educational settings that empowerment and liberation can take place.

Our project, an effort to determine the level of knowledge of future teachers, was also an attempt to open dialogue between people from different cultures. The overall expectation was that the involved individuals would learn more about each other. We hoped that the students' learning eventually goes beyond the stereotypical presentations in the media. Their deeper understanding is

only possible through direct communication by individuals in different nations. Personal reflection, sharing, exchanging ideas, and understanding each other through critical personal reflection can develop effective future teachers. By reflecting on their lives as individuals and as members of a particular society in another nation, students have an opportunity to analyze social issues and relations between nations and continents.

We hope that our explorations across borders will contribute to the acknowledgment, appreciation, awareness, sen-

sitivity, and respect of people with a different cultural background. To educate functional, caring, participatory citizens of a new world in which cooperation supersedes competition among nation-states, it is important that future teachers know how to affirm diversity in their own setting and at a global level.

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